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Cloak, Dagger, And Candle

A team of some of The New York Times' top reporters have studied the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency. Their conclusions calm somewhat fears that the CIA, operating out of sight of the public and of most officials, has become an uncontrollable force.

The fears are natural. CIA's budget is not out in the open. It is hidden within the budgets of other federal agencies.

The public hears of the CIA only when it is in trouble: when a U-2 is downed, or an agent is caught red-handed by a foreign government, or in that sink of CIA activity, the Bay of Pigs. Official disclaimers, plus a natural shock that good ol' fair-play, above-board Americans should be involved in such rough and immoral games, help feed the impression that the CIA operates on its own.

The Times team raised questions about the

basic reasons for existence of the CIA. But they did conclude its activities are subject to executive department scrutiny. Its budget, they said, is ample but not unbounded; and no money is expended without prior Budget Bureau approval.

Some of CIA's blunders have been horrendous. Many of its errors have been due to human failings; others have resulted from accidents; others can be traced to the expertise of other countries' intelligence agencies.

We're unhappy about CIA blunders, but we don't question the need for its existence. The most serious question about the intelligence organization is whether the same agency that gathers the information should aid in formulating policy and also execute it. Such an arrangement fails to bring enough outside judgment to bear. This is the aspect of CIA that most needs examination.